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FOREIGN DEPARTMENT

LAVINIA L. DOCK, R.N. DEPARTMENT EDITOR

NURSING CONDITIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA

BY LOUISA KURATH, R.N.
Callao, Bellavista, Peru

THERE is very little nursing, as it is understood in the United States, in South American countries. There are fine hospital buildings, and splendid doctors (many of them having studied in England, France and the United States) in the larger cities, but the nursing is done by untrained Sisters of Charity, or by servants, except in a few private hospitals operated for their own employees, by mining corporations or business concerns. In these may be found foreign graduate nurses.

Here in Peru, an attempt is being made to train native girls, and I understand that it is the only effort along that line on the West Coast. This school was founded about six years ago by an American nurse, Miss Carner, who came to Peru to take care of the wife of a Peruvian doctor. He had never known a graduate nurse before, and was so impressed by her work that he asked her to stay and organize a training school for nurses in connection with the Government Hospitals. As he was a director on the Hospital Board and was influential, Miss Carner reluctantly accepted the position. She had had no special preparation for teaching, but she saw the need for a school. Unfortunately, nursing was, and still is, considered servant's work, and it was only possible to get that class of girls as students.

The school is under a Medical Director—a physician, and time off duty, vacations, etc., are arranged by him. He also disciplines the nurses when necessary, and not infrequently takes the part of the student rather than of the Director even though the latter may be in the right. The school is a mixed one, with men and women students, and that makes for many difficulties in a country where the morals are as they are here.

The Sisters of Charity have charge of the linen, diets, cleaning and medicines, which limits the experience of the student nurses. As the entrance requirement is only Primary School, (a five-year course) it can well be understood that the theoretical teaching must be very elementary. The nurses so trained are not making nursing very popular among the better class of Peruvians.

Miss Carner resigned after three years, and was succeeded by an English trained nurse, a fine woman. She worked hard to improve things, and finally resigned because she could not do so. The present Directora is not a graduate nurse, but an English missionary who had a three months' course in nursing before coming here, seven years ago. As there is no Spanish speaking nurse available, she is trying to keep things going until her assistant, an English graduate nurse, learns the language. At present there are not more than six

graduate nurses, except those locally trained, in all of Peru, except those in mining hospitals, etc. Only three of the six know any Spanish.

The great need of the country is for well trained nurses who know, or are willing to learn, the language. Sanitary conditions are very bad. Every one expectorates on the floor, walls, sidewalks and street cars. Tuberculosis takes a heavy toll. Most of the people sleep with windows and doors tight shut, as night air is considered dangerous. Baths are taken only in summer time, this applies to all classes of society. Typhoid fever is endemic. Public health nurses are needed and baby welfare stations, for the infant mortality is said to exceed that of China.

The government is willing and anxious to improve conditions, but nurses are not available, and nurses are needed to work out some of the problems.

Conditions in the local hospitals are bad. Even where they have a training school, patients are left to the care of servants at night. Wards are full of flies and mosquitoes. Linen and the hospitals in general are not kept clean.

The British American Community has recently purchased and opened a hospital which is screened and ratproof, the first on the Coast. It is primarily for English-speaking people, but any one can come here. The building is quite a curiosity, I am frequently asked how we get rid of the flies that get in, or, more often, what it is all for.

Four of the six graduate nurses in Peru, are here with us. The other two are with the Government, one in charge of the Insane Asylum, which is the cleanest and the most up-to-date part of the Peruvian Sanitary Department, and the other in the Training School at Lima.

We have started a Training School here with six students; a small beginning, but we are trying to get the better class of girls interested, and train them to the best of our ability. We have fortunately succeeded in getting six fine young women, most of them with a bit more than primary education; and we have some promising applicants.

Nursing conditions in the other countries on this Coast are said to be the same, or worse than here. We are hoping that some nurses who do know Spanish, and are capable of teaching and leading these people may decide to "come over and help us" as the harvest truly is great, and the laborers are very, very few.

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